



Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Repression of Protest and Dissent in Canada: The Wet'suwet'en Land Defense Movement & #ShutDownCanada

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ABSTRACT The Wet'suwet'en land defense movement and the allied #ShutDownCanada protests remain some of the most highly publicized anti-pipeline protest events of the last decade. This protest movement offers an insight into how Canada protects and reproduces its accumulation by resource extraction strategy. Situating this research within an observed global phenomenon of growing intolerance to protest and dissent in democratic contexts, I illuminate the ways through which opposition against extractive projects is repressed by the Canadian settler colonial state in the contemporary era of neoliberalism. Drawing on the political economy framework of "authoritarian neoliberalism," I elucidate the legal, discursive, and coercive means through which extractive projects are insulated from public opposition. These means are repressing the democratic right to protest in Canada and indicate that Canada is no exception to a broader global deterioration of democracy under a political-economic system that is antagonistic to social solidarity and collective action. Moreover, these repressive strategies exacerbate the violent and dispossessive nature of Canada's settler colonial extractive capitalism.

KEYWORDS political economy; protest and dissent; Indigenous land defenders; authoritarian neoliberalism; extractive capitalism

This article applies the framework of "authoritarian neoliberalism" (Bruff, 2014) to examine the Canadian state's response to public opposition against resource extraction projects. The framework proposes that authoritarianism is increasingly finding expression in traditionally liberal democratic states in the post-2008 neoliberal era, characterized by legal and constitutional changes that restrict opportunities to express resistance, intensified coercive responses to protests, and a discourse of "economic necessity" which frames the restriction of democratic rights as vital to the nation's prosperity (Bruff, 2014; Tansel,

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2017). These repressive strategies predominantly target the mobilizing efforts of groups who critique socio-economic and environmental state policies and projects (Kaygusuz, 2018). This article explores how authoritarian neoliberalism manifests in Canada, centering the analysis on the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement and the allied 2020 #ShutDownCanada protests which oppose the construction of the Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline through unceded Indigenous territory. I argue that the Canadian state employs a variety of legal, discursive, and coercive means to stifle public opposition to neoliberal extractivism, and that these means are repressing the democratic right to protest and dissent. I situate this research within an observed global phenomenon of deteriorating democracies and growing intolerance to protest and dissent in democratic contexts (Atiles, 2023; Brown, 2017; Hickel, 2016; Lammert & Vormann, 2019; Watts, 2019). While the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement and the #ShutDownCanada protests serve as the case study for this analysis, the insights are representative of a larger, disconcerting picture of the state of Canadian democracy.

The article contributes a political economy analysis of pipeline resistance in the Canadian context. Other works from different disciplines have examined this particular case from the perspectives of settler colonial governance (Crosby, 2021; McCreary & Turner, 2018), environmental justice (van Meijeren Karp, 2020), infrastructural anthropology (Spice, 2018), and others. I take a different approach in situating the analysis amongst a body of literature engaged with the relationship between neoliberalism and democracy, examining the deterioration of democracy and growing intolerance towards expressions of public discontent by liberal democratic states in the neoliberal era. While the framework of authoritarian neoliberalism has gained significant traction among scholars (to date, Bruff's paper, "The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism" (2014) has been cited 1,030 times, according to Google Scholar), it has yet to be applied to academic analyses in the Canadian settler colonial context.

The Canadian Context: Settler Colonialism in an Age of Neoliberal Extractivism

Canada, with its history of British and French colonialists invading Indigenous territories for permanent settlement, is widely considered a settler colonial state (see Coulthard, 2014; Crosby, 2021; Pasternak & Ceric, 2023; Thobani, 2007). Settler colonialism has been theorized as distinctly different from other forms of colonialism as its ultimate goal is the dissolution of native societies and the establishment of a new colonial society on the expropriated land base (Veracini, 2015; Wolfe, 2006). The creation of this new colonial society occurs through various processes guided by what Wolfe (2006) coins a "logic of elimination," "premised on the securing – the obtaining and maintaining – of territory" (p. 402). In the Canadian context, historical atrocities such as the

residential school system (Milloy, 1999), discriminatory and racist policies such as the *Indian Act* (Joseph, 2018), and the creation of the reserve system (Thobani, 2007) exemplify just some of Canada's settler colonial strategies that aimed to achieve its vision of a nation of white Christian settlers. The CGL pipeline's construction through unceded Wet'suwet'en territory centers on perhaps the most prominent contemporary expression of enduring settler colonialism in Canada: the invasion of Indigenous lands for accumulation by resource extraction.

Canada's state formation and capitalist development as a settler colonial state has always been and continues to be premised on a system built on the exclusion and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, driven by the ultimate goal of obtaining resource-rich land (Coulthard, 2014). However, with the rise of neoliberalism, referring to the political-economic project of restructuring economies through privatization, deregulation and a withdrawal of the state from social service provisions (Harvey, 2007), came a massive expansion of Canada's privatized resource extraction sector (Preston, 2017). "Neoliberal extractivism," characterized by deregulated, large-scale extraction (Fast, 2014), became a hegemonic accumulation strategy for the Canadian state, particularly through the development of petro-infrastructure such as pipelines (Crosby & Monaghan, 2018). While the commodification of nature has always been a part of capitalism, Prudham (2007, p. 410) argues that neoliberalism represents a "stretching and deepening" of this phenomenon. Similarly, Fast (2014) asserts that the neoliberal policy agenda, through widespread privatization of communally held assets, has enhanced the ability of the owners of capital to extract an even greater share of wealth from the environment and its natural resources. This is particularly evident with current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has approved and endorsed the construction of several major pipelines by private extractive companies to transport oil and gas to United States and Asian markets since being elected in 2015. These include the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline, the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline, the Keystone XL pipeline, LNG Canada (which includes the CGL pipeline), and the Towerbirch pipeline expansion (Government of Canada, 2020). Thus, neoliberalism has arguably exacerbated the violent processes that accompany accumulation by resource extraction, particularly for Indigenous peoples as their land is increasingly targeted for resource extraction projects.

The struggle surrounding the CGL pipeline on Wet'suwet'en territory is representative of Indigenous land dispossession in a decade of intensified neoliberal resource extraction. While the repression of Indigenous land defense movements by the Canadian state is not novel to the neoliberal era, it is pertinent to examine how repressive strategies towards Indigenous land defenders are exacerbated in evolving political contexts. The adoption of an authoritarian neoliberalism framework in this analysis seeks to draw attention to the ways the neoliberal state intensifies existing inequalities and reinforces colonial power structures, contextualizing these dynamics in an era of growing global intolerance to protest and dissent in the post-2008 era.

Methods and Data Sources

I employ a single case study approach focusing on the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement and the allied #ShutDownCanada protests in the period between 2010 and 2020. Following a "disciplined configurative case study" approach, I use the established theory of authoritarian neoliberalism as the frame through which to analyze the case (George & Bennett, 2005, as cited in Thomas, 2011). The qualitative research method entails document analysis, "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" which requires that "data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen 2009, p. 27). I gathered secondary sources using purposive sampling (Flick, 2023), focusing on documents between 2010 and 2020 that were thematically aligned with the case study.¹ These include media sources, investigative reports, state documents, legislation acts, strategy documents, law enforcement reports, legal analyses, research reports, and peer-reviewed journal articles. The data sources provided an empirical base to illuminate the Canadian state's practices that repress opposition to extractivism. Thematic analysis of the data sources was guided by the categories provided by the theoretical framework (Bowen, 2009), focusing on state practices repressing public opposition through legal, coercive, and discursive means.

The Wet'suwet'en Land Defense Movement and #ShutDownCanada

The roots of the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement lie in the 1997 *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* Supreme Court of Canada case, which affirmed the Wet'suwet'en Nation's Aboriginal rights and title to their territory spanning 22,000 kilometres (Hume & Walby, 2021). Despite this ruling, the CGL project was approved by the province in 2015, and construction began in 2018. The approval of the project is often justified due to the consent provided by the First Nations elected band councils which hold jurisdiction over the reserve lands through which the pipeline intends to run (Hume & Walby, 2021). However, the band council system itself was established under the *Indian Act*, which outlawed traditional governance systems and is widely considered a colonial imposition (Hume & Walby, 2021). The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs, who never eliminated their traditional governance system, thus assert their continuous and full jurisdiction over their territory, particularly the non-reserve lands through which the pipeline would run (Hume & Walby, 2021). Since interest in pipeline construction in the territory was first expressed in 2007, Wet'suwet'en land defenders and their allies have firmly opposed the pipeline project. They began establishing several camps along the proposed route to prevent access to their territory, such as the Unist'ot'en Camp and the

¹ If identified as relevant to the analysis, a document may fall outside of the 2010-2020 period.

Gidimt'en Access Point (Bellrichard & Barrera, 2020). Over the last decade, these structures have represented an important re-occupation of Indigenous land and a symbol of resistance to extractive capitalism. In February 2020, during the enforcement of an injunction sought by CGL to remove the barricades and protesters preventing access to the CGL construction site, 28 land defenders were arrested, inciting the nation-wide solidarity movement known as #ShutDownCanada. Through numerous railway and road blockades across Canada, allies demanded the removal of CGL and the RCMP from Wet'suwet'en lands (Bellrichard & Barrera, 2020). Several major protests blocked access to the Port of Vancouver and two other ports in the area (Carrigg, 2020). Bridge blockades occurred across the country, including in Niagara Falls and Ivy Lea (Canadian Press, 2020b), and the sole bridge connecting Prince Edward Island (Moore, 2020). Rail blockades were perhaps the most disruptive, shutting down commuter and industrial rail operations for almost two weeks across the country (Canadian Press, 2020a). Overall, the solidarity protests resulted in a national disruption in the flow of resources and mobility between February 2020 and early March 2020.

The Rising Intolerance to Protest & Dissent

Taylor and van Dyke (2007, p. 263) define protest as the “collective use of unconventional methods of political participation to try to persuade or coerce authorities to support a challenging group’s aims.” The category of protest is mainly applied to the actions of non-dominant groups, while similar actions by powerful groups are framed as legitimate or remain unexamined (Martin, 1994). The protest tactic of occupying contentious sites in the form of blockades as observed in the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement is one of the most powerful and long-standing tactics of Indigenous resistance in Canada and the United States (Barker, 2015). It is essential to note the distinction between protest movements and Indigenous resistance movements, as the latter has “maintained languages, nationalisms, and traditions despite centuries of colonial violence” (Mills, 2017, p. 4). This distinction recognizes the resilience of Indigenous movements against ongoing identity erasure. At the same time, it is pertinent to situate these within a broader landscape of resistance movements confronting various forms of injustice and domination in the contemporary neoliberal era. While the repression of protest and dissent has a long history in liberal democracies (Peterson & Wahlström, 2015), scholars from a range of discipline note that criminalization and repression of resistance movements have been on the rise over the last decade across the globe (Atiles, 2023; Bessant & Grasso, 2019; Brown, 2021; Lindt, 2023; Maroto Calatayud, 2023). This is echoed in reports of human rights and civil liberties organizations (The Global Civil Society Alliance, 2023; International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations, 2021; Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). Not only has the propensity to criminalize resistance risen in this time, but the way

protest is policed has changed as well. As noted by Gillham and Noakes (2007), a new form of protest policing referred to as “strategic incapacitation” emerged in the post-9/11 era. In contrast to protest policing models based on negotiation, mutual cooperation between protesters and police, and maintaining order without the use of excessive force, strategic incapacitation emphasizes pre-emptive action and risk management strategies (Gillham & Noakes, 2007). These include tactics such as arresting key protest leaders pre-emptively, setting up physical barriers to prevent gatherings from forming, and using surveillance technologies to monitor protesters and gather intelligence to disrupt organizing efforts, in order to neutralize protests before they gain momentum (Gillham et al., 2013).

As theorists of authoritarian neoliberalism suggest, this increase in protest repression and the observed changes in protest policing represent an authoritarian shift in how governments deal with opposition to neoliberal economic projects in the post-2008 era (Tansel, 2017). Studies documenting the increasing repression and criminalization of protest across the globe have observed trends aligned with those put forth by the authoritarian neoliberalism framework: legislative changes that limit opportunities for resistance, rising state-sanctioned coercive measures against dissenters, and the economic justification of such means (Doran, 2017; Shantz, 2014; Watts, 2019). In the case of the Wet’suwet’en land defenders and #ShutDownCanada, the Canadian state has responded to this expression of discontent in similar legal, discursive, and coercive means, as the following section will illustrate.

The Authoritarian Neoliberal Mechanisms of the Canadian State in Protecting and Reproducing Neoliberal Extractivism

Legal Mechanisms: Court Injunctions

Court injunctions have played a major role in the Wet’suwet’en land defense movement. An injunction is a court order that prohibits specific actions while a lawsuit is pending (Ceric, 2020). Once granted, resistance to extractive projects, such as protests or blocking access to land, is criminalized due to non-compliance with the court order, leading to penalties like imprisonment, fines, and criminal records (Ceric, 2020). In the case of the CGL pipeline, the first injunction in favor of CGL was issued in December 2018 and was enforced in January 2019, resulting in the dismantling of land blockades and the arrest of 14 land defenders (Alam, 2019). Another enforcement of an injunction resulted in dismantling newly established barricades in February 2020, as well as the arrest of 28 protesters (Alam, 2019). Court injunctions were widely used to thwart the #ShutDownCanada solidarity protests as well. Within a three-week period in February 2020, 12 court injunctions were granted, most to Canadian railway companies to remove blockades from rail lines (McKenzie-Sutter, 2020). Shiri Pasternak and Irina Ceric, scholars who have written extensively

on the use of court injunctions to police Indigenous resistance, stated in a news article that many of the Wet'suwet'en solidarity-related injunctions were issued "after an application heard without notice, founded on minimal evidence, and with only lawyers for the corporation in attendance" (Pasternak & Ceric, 2020, para. 8). In their scholarly work, Ceric (2020) argues that extractive industries are increasingly using injunctions in public struggles over land to frame these as private disputes, sidestepping the constitutionally-derived rights of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, in a review of over 100 court injunction cases from the years 1973 to 2019, 76% of injunctions filed by corporations against First Nations were granted, while 81% of injunctions filed against corporations by First Nations were denied (Pasternak & King, 2019, p. 10). A follow-up report in 2020 found that the gap had widened in just that single year: the percentage of successful injunctions sought by corporations against First Nations increased from 76% to 81% (Pasternak & Ceric, 2023, p. 8).

Pasternak and Ceric (2023) attribute the discrepancy in injunction cases to the legal tests used in granting or denying them. The "balance of convenience" test, for example, weighs the harm to corporations against the rights of land defenders, often favouring the former on the basis of financial harm (Pasternak & Ceric, 2023). This approach reduces the issue to a private property dispute, sidestepping broader questions about Indigenous sovereignty and constitutional rights. Another test which is used to make injunction decisions is based on the concept of "public interest," which is intended to determine whether granting an injunction aligns with the public good (Pasternak & Ceric, 2023). As Pasternak and Ceric (2023) contend, the public interest arguments used in these tests are "weighed towards a specific understanding of the 'status quo' in Canada that is rooted in a political economy of resource extraction" (p. 10). Public interest usually refers to "the completion or continued operation of an approved or licensed project," such as a pipeline construction, "never to the inception or maintenance of the Indigenous legal order or governance system" (p. 24). It is thus apparent how these legal tests are embedded within a broader settler colonial logic of Indigenous land dispossession and resource extraction which inevitably favours the economic interests of private industry.

It is evident that injunctions act as a crucial contemporary settler colonial strategy to subject Indigenous peoples and allied social movements to repression, thereby facilitating access to resources and lands to ease the operation of extractivism. This juridical form of furthering Indigenous land dispossession is also representative of the authoritarian neoliberal phenomenon of private corporations levying state power to pursue their economic interests, in this case through the channel of courts. Injunctions and the courts' increasing tendency to grant them in favor of private corporations therefore constitute a significant legal mechanism through which public opposition toward capitalist projects can be stifled. The discourse of economic necessity central to authoritarian neoliberalism is also evident in the case of injunctions, which are often granted to corporations under the guise of public interest, defined in terms

of economic stability and the uninterrupted development of extractive projects. Thus, court injunctions serve as a juridical avenue through which extractive projects are insulated from public opposition by the Canadian state.

Legal Mechanisms: Alberta's Bill-1 & Manitoba's Bill-57

On February 25, 2020, Alberta introduced a new law known as Bill-1, or *The Critical Infrastructure Defence Act*. The bill is intended to protect “critical infrastructure by creating offences for wilfully and without lawful right, justification, or excuse trespassing upon critical infrastructure; damaging or destroying critical infrastructure; or obstructing, interrupting, or interfering with the construction, maintenance, use, or operation of critical infrastructure in a manner that renders it dangerous, useless, inoperative, or ineffective” (Government of Alberta, 2024). The bill was introduced as a direct response to the #ShutDownCanada protests in an attempt to stop the economically damaging railway and road blockades, and came into effect on June 17, 2020 (Chan, 2022). Bill-1 has received overwhelmingly negative and critical news coverage since its introduction. Numerous opinion pieces in the media have commented on how the legislation is an attempt to criminalize the constitutionally protected right to protest and dissent (Blanchette, 2020; French, 2020; Jordan, 2020; Lambert, 2020). Points of critique include the bill’s ambiguity in defining what can be considered “critical infrastructure,” its authoritarian undertones in discouraging dissent, and its undeniable objective of criminalizing Indigenous land defense movements. Likewise, Indigenous leaders have voiced major discontent with the bill (Morin, 2020), as well as several law experts. Lazare (2020) argues that legislation such as Bill-1 contradict the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as they prevent participation in the political system and limit freedom of expression, while Koshan et al. (2020) conclude that Bill-1 violates at least five different fundamental rights and freedoms of the Charter. Thus, many agree that the introduction and passing of Bill-1 seriously undermines citizens’ ability to express their discontent in spaces that could be classified as “critical infrastructure.” While 90% of what is considered critical infrastructure is privately owned and operated in Canada, the ambiguity in the definition of the term within Bill-1 is concerning, as it does not explicitly exclude public spaces (Koshan et al., 2020).

In December 2020, the province of Manitoba introduced Bill-57, a piece of legislation which is equally broad in its definition of what constitutes critical infrastructure, classifying infrastructure as critical “if it makes a significant contribution to the health, security or economic well-being of Manitobans” (The Protection of Critical Infrastructure Act, 2021, p. 2). The broadness of this definition is reflected in the Bill’s long list of infrastructures that are deemed critical (The Protection of Critical Infrastructure Act, 2021, p. 9). Like Bill-1, the introduction of Bill-57 was a direct response to the Wet’suwet’en

solidarity protests. Bill-1 and Bill-57 exemplify un-democratic legislative changes that inhibit individuals' ability to express their dissent towards extractive projects. Such legislations give private energy corporations, the operators of critical infrastructure, distinct advantages in disputes over contested petro-infrastructure projects. In the context of neoliberal extractivism and the expansion of petro-infrastructure projects, Indigenous and environmental groups who most strongly register their discontent with extractive projects are particularly affected by this type of legislation. Though the bills were not used to lay any charges against protesters during the #ShutDownCanada movement, they nonetheless constitute a significant legal repressive strategy, as their existence sends a strong message of deterrence. The bills can be considered a form of "preventative repression," which intends to compromise protesters' abilities to generate public support (Tertytchnaya, 2023), and echoes Gillham and Noakes' (2007) concept of strategic incapacitation. Such laws not only protect the neoliberal extractive industry by undermining the democratic right to protest and dissent, but also intensify and extend the violent and dispossessive processes of the Canadian settler colonial capitalist order. Injunctions and critical infrastructure laws thus work hand-in-hand to insulate extractive projects from public opposition. Alberta's Bill-1, notably, bypasses the need for injunctions, granting police the authority to remove protesters from whatever is deemed critical infrastructure without judicial oversight. The authoritarian neoliberalism tendency to levy state and juridical power and to employ legal mechanisms to thwart public opposition to neoliberal projects is thus visible in the case of the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement and #ShutDownCanada.

Discursive Mechanisms: Critical Infrastructure Protection

The term "critical infrastructure" plays a central role in Canadian security policymaking. Defined by the Canadian government as "processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government" (Government of Canada, 2009, p. 2), critical infrastructure maintains a designated security category known as "critical infrastructure protection" (CIP). Energy and utilities are one of the 10 critical infrastructure sectors, thereby designating extractive projects such as pipelines as vital to the security and economic health of Canada. The economic necessity discourse of authoritarian neoliberalism thus manifests quite glaringly through CIP and can be considered a key component in facilitating and protecting the expansion of Canada's natural resource industry. One area in which this is evident is in the strategic encouraging of partnerships between private energy corporations and public security agencies. For example, in Canada's 2018-2020 *Action Plan for Critical Infrastructure*, there is a strong focus on building partnerships and enhancing information sharing between "critical

infrastructure owners and operators” and the Canadian state in the name of CIP. The plan is “designed to help foster collaboration and information sharing among all levels of government and private sector partners,” with the first strategic objective being “building partnerships” (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 8). Building partnerships is also identified as one of the 2010-2017 accomplishments, referencing “considerable progress in sustaining and enhancing partnerships” (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 3). “Sharing and protecting information” is the second strategic objective of the plan, which includes increasing the number of secret-level cleared stakeholders (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 11). Canada’s 2013 *Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, which outlines the numerous ways through which the Canadian government strives to protect critical infrastructure from potential terrorist activity, also places a strong emphasis on partnership and information sharing with the private sector (Government of Canada, 2013, p. 12), as well as with the police force: “The RCMP also works with private sector critical infrastructure partners to proactively address terrorist threats to critical infrastructure” (Government of Canada, 2013, p. 37). Indeed, the RCMP operates a whole security unit dedicated to CIP, named the *Critical Infrastructure Intelligence Team*, which “includes a Suspicious Incident Reporting system to gather information from private industry and local law enforcement about suspicious incidents” (Government of Canada, 2013, p. 19; emphasis added). Information sharing between security agencies and the private sector, in the form of “information sharing agreements” between “the Government of Canada and specific sectors and owners of critical infrastructure,” is also highlighted as a key counter-terrorism strategy (Government of Canada, 2013, p. 20).

The reviewed documents demonstrate concerted efforts to foster collaboration and information sharing among the state, security agencies, law enforcement and the private sector. Other analyses share similar findings. For example, Monaghan and Walby (2017) reveal how constituents of energy corporations regularly attend meetings and briefings held by security agencies, and are privy to classified information through special, CIP-related security clearances (which the Canadian state, as noted above, planned to increase in 2018-2020). Similarly, Dafnos (2020) illustrates the assemblage of industry, law enforcement, intelligence agencies and government actors that cooperate on matters of energy and utility security, and showcases how such partnerships are portrayed as essential to critical infrastructure resilience in state documents. Pasternak and Dafnos (2018) also note the “formal integration of corporations and industries as partners in national security” (p. 749) advanced by government departments, law enforcement, and security agencies over the last decade. With the private sector owning 90% of what is considered critical infrastructure in Canada (Crosby & Monaghan, 2018), these partnerships serve to advance the intertwining interests of the state and private corporations involved in resource extraction. They also signal a concerning reconfiguration of law enforcement and security agencies as allies to private industry. As

Crosby & Monaghan (2018) argue, these CIP-centred public-private partnerships have re-formulated the purpose of policing to act as a protective arm of extractive capitalism. Thus, public security agencies intended to ensure the safety of all citizens are re-cast as protectors of extractive operations through partnerships that are strategically encouraged within state documents and justified under the guise of national security and economic well-being. This is exemplary of authoritarian neoliberalism's tendency to economically justify undemocratic reconfigurations of public institutions. Moreover, CIP rationalizes the criminalization of those expressing dissent towards critical infrastructure projects such as pipelines.

Coercive Means: The Criminalization of Environmental and Land Defenders

While the criminalization of Indigenous resistance movements is not novel to the neoliberal era, the contemporary assemblage of actors involved in CIP and the enshrinement of critical infrastructure as a national security category brings new resources and tools into the long-standing settler colonial practice of policing Indigenous resistance that allow for intensified repression (Crosby & Monaghan, 2018). This echoes Bruff's (2014) argument about the neoliberal state's increased reliance on coercive means to suppress opposition to capitalist projects, as is evident in the policing of the Wet'suwet'en land defenders. One aspect of Indigenous movement policing that is particularly apparent in this case is the assemblage of state, security, and private companies involved in CIP. Spice (2018), writing about her time at the Unist'ot'en camp, claims that there was very apparent preferential treatment by law enforcement toward CGL. This preferential treatment is alluded to in a filmed confrontation at the camp when a land defender tells a police officer that it takes them only 20 minutes to arrive at camp when CGL calls, but two hours when land defenders make a complaint (Unist'ot'en Camp, 2019). These instances reveal the webs of cooperation that exist between state security agencies and the private energy sector, as do the raids carried out at the land defense camps in the enforcement of the injunctions sought by CGL. An investigation by *The Guardian* into documents included at an RCMP strategy session for the first raid of the Wet'suwet'en camps in 2019 revealed that police officers attended CGL developer TC Energy's planning sessions and daily meetings (Dhillon & Parrish, 2019). Collaboration such as this between law enforcement and private extractive companies, which are encouraged and enshrined in state documents related to national security, exemplifies a central aspect of authoritarian neoliberalism, where the state increasingly acts as an enforcer of private interests, prioritizing the protection of extractive industries over Indigenous sovereignty and public accountability. The documents also show that before the raid, the RCMP used surveillance technology to monitor the land defenders, a protest policing tactic reminiscent of strategic incapacitation intended to disrupt protest activities pre-emptively (Gillham & Noakes, 2007), thereby

undermining individuals' democratic right to protest and, again, prioritizing the protection of private industry over that of the people.

The documents investigated by *The Guardian* further reveal a strategic emphasis on force. RCMP commanders stated that "lethal overwatch is required" during the raid, which is a term for deploying an officer who is prepared to use lethal force (Dhillon & Parrish, 2019, para. 2). They also instructed officers to "use as much violence toward the gate as you want" and to make absolutely no exceptions in arresting everyone in the injunction area, including children (para. 3). These tactics were evident during the February 2020 raids on the land defense camps. On February 6, six land defenders were arrested by RCMP equipped with guns and tactical gear (Bellrichard & Brend, 2020), followed by the arrest of four more the next day during a second raid involving approximately 40 RCMP officers (Brown & Bracken, 2020). The RCMP continued moving through the camps, dismantling structures and arresting land defenders, until reaching the final camp blocking access to the CGL site on February 10 (McIntosh, 2020b). According to observers, the officers had police dogs with them as well as tactical teams who were pointing their guns at the camp (McIntosh, 2020b). This final raid culminated in the arrest of seven land defenders, including four of the First Nation's matriarchs (Brown & Bracken, 2020; McIntosh, 2020b). The excessive force exhibited by the RCMP, including the use of tactical gear, lethal overwatch, and military equipment, reflects the authoritarian neoliberal characteristic of resorting to escalating coercive means when protests threaten key economic projects like the CGL pipeline.

Several journalists were also arrested during the RCMP's raids on the Wet'suwet'en land defense camps, and the establishment of an exclusion zone blocked journalists and legal observers from accessing the site (McIntosh, 2020a), preventing visibility and limiting media coverage of the raids. This exclusion zone was expanded dramatically on the third day of the RCMP raids (Seatter, 2020). Journalists who attempted to document or record the events were threatened with arrest (McIntosh, 2020a). International organizations such as the *Committee to Protect Journalists*, *Reporters without Borders* and *Amnesty International* condemned the persistent infringements on press freedoms carried out by the RCMP during the policing of the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement (McIntosh, 2020a). Arrests of journalists and the establishment of exclusion zones are a hallmark of authoritarian governance that seeks to suppress dissent and obstruct public scrutiny of capitalist projects.

It is also important to note that the raids on the Wet'suwet'en land defense camps were carried out by the Community-Industry Response Group (C-IRG), a militarized operational arm of the RCMP in British Columbia. This group has since been widely condemned for its extremely violent policing tactics following an investigation into C-IRG officer conduct (Madsen, 2024; Murphy, 2022). Land defenders have reported the C-IRG officers' tendency to disrespect Indigenous culture by interrupting ceremony or preventing community members from engaging in cultural activities (Murphy, 2022). The

extent of physical violence exerted by the C-IRG would become more thoroughly and explicitly documented after the 2020-2021 Fairy Creek protests (see Seucharan, 2021; Zoledziowski, 2021), but it is telling that the C-IRG was a constant presence at the Wet'suwet'en land defense camps. The deployment of the C-IRG to police this protest movement highlights the growing militarization of protest policing under neoliberalism, where specialized forces with seemingly lax conduct standards are used to protect corporate investments through violent repression, echoing the authoritarian tendencies of the neoliberal state. With pipeline construction underway at the time of writing, land defenders continue to be arrested (Simmons, 2023).

Conclusion

Utilizing the theoretical framework of authoritarian neoliberalism, this article has elucidated the repressive strategies used by the Canadian state to insulate neoliberal extractive projects from public opposition, including court injunctions, the introduction of repressive legislations, the leveraging of a security category of critical infrastructure to justify un-democratic reconfigurations, and excessive force in protest policing. Other protests in Canada have been subject to similar repressive tactics as those explored in this article. The 2021 anti-logging protest movement in B.C. is most notable, which saw at least 866 protestors arrested in the span of five months (Sandoval, 2021). I determine that these protective mechanisms are exemplary of the authoritarian neoliberal practices that seek to silence popular resistance as observed in other parts of the world in the post-2008 neoliberal era. These legal, discursive, and coercive means also constitute an exacerbation of settler colonial power and control, particularly in the unregulated and privatized landscape of resource extraction that permeates the neoliberal age. As noted in the introduction, this analysis does not mean to suggest that the violent, un-democratic and disciplinary characteristics of the capitalist state are an innovation unique to the post-2008 neoliberal context. Rather, the analysis proposes that the ways through which neoliberal extractivism is protected and reproduced in the current neoliberal era reflect *escalating* authoritarian tendencies in the state's response to mounting expressions of resistance to extractive projects. The repression of protest and dissent in this manner is part of a broader, global deterioration of democracy in the post-2008 neoliberal era, in which neoliberal policies, particularly environmentally destructive ones, are being increasingly challenged. The case study of the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement and #ShutDownCanada has served to illustrate how authoritarian neoliberalism finds expression in the Canadian settler colonial context and how resistance to extractive projects brings the authoritarian tendencies of a neoliberal order to the fore.

Several implications emerge from this analysis. First, the repression of protest and dissent is occurring in tandem with growing concerns about climate

change, yet efforts to protect the environment are being significantly undermined. Through a legal framework that prioritizes the uninhibited operations of private industry and legislation which escalates the illegality of protesting in certain spaces, opportunities to resist large-scale environmental destruction are significantly curbed. Given the concerning rate of climate change, public opposition to extractive projects is likely to become an ever-greater political tool to pressure governments to act. In other parts of the world, opposition to fossil fuel projects is actually contributing to bans on oil and gas activity (Environmental Defence Canada, 2020), and so it is paramount that the right to express this opposition is protected and upheld in Canada. Second, CIP policies have significantly enhanced policing power. State-backed cooperation between industry and policing entities, as well as legislative changes that allow police to arrest protesters without judicial oversight, represent a concerning increase in police authority over protest movements. With policing power already constituting a violent settler colonial strategy, it is essential that the enhancement of policing power be exposed and challenged by the public. Third, the assemblage of strategies aimed at repressing protest makes it increasingly difficult to challenge Canada's accumulation by resource extraction. Though propagated as economically necessary and for the good of all Canadians, studies show that most Canadians and Indigenous peoples do not reap the benefits of the resource extraction sector, as the bulk of extractive companies are owned by private, foreign corporations (see Campbell, 2013; Fast, 2014; Stefanick & Shrivastava, 2015). Beyond wealth inequality, the environmental unsustainability of extractivism is a critical concern, especially in light of Canada's commitment to reduce carbon emissions, and so the ability to mobilize and challenge this accumulation strategy is vital.

The implications emerging out of an authoritarian neoliberal analysis of Canada's resource politics are disconcerting and deserve further scrutiny. Canada's adoption of a neoliberal policy agenda and the current federal government's advocacy for neoliberal extractivism in the form of petro-infrastructure expansion has exacerbated the violent and dispossessive impacts of accumulation by resource extraction, and the insulation of extractive capitalism from public opposition is further reinforcing the exclusionary, settler colonial capitalist order of Canada. The repressive means explored in this article constitute an alarming iteration of settler colonial elimination logic, as Indigenous peoples' freedom to challenge the invasion of their territories and the destruction of the environment is stifled criminalized in escalating ways. The case study of the Wet'suwet'en land defense movement and #ShutDownCanada illustrates that Canada, though widely perceived as a tolerant and free society, is no exception to a broader global deterioration of democracy under a political-economic system – neoliberalism – that is antagonistic to social solidarity and collective action.

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